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special dishes of the season vary from province to province. In a northern province such as Honan, chiao-tzu (meat dumplings) are particular favorites; as one moves south, rice-based delicacies such as nien-kao (year cakes) figure more prominently in the New Year's feasts. Besides being a time of celebration, the New Year is also the time for settling accounts, and, for many farmers there has been little left for celebrating when the creditors have all been dealt with.

The regular work of the agricultural year begins immediately after the New Year. In Honan the farming cycle is governed by the need to conserve water and by the demands of the principal crops: wheat, millet, kaoliang. From the Yangtze south through the Central-South Region, the year is phased by the steps in wet rice cultivation. In early spring, the Honan farmer begins his year-long effort to conserve moisture that has accumulated in the soil during the autumn and winter rains. About half of the fields are then in winter fallow awaiting the spring planting; the rest are planted in winter wheat. Fertilizer from the household pit is spread on the fallow fields. The wheat is brought to maturity by careful hoeing and by hand irrigation using well water -- a back-breaking operation in which the farmer is helped by his whole family.

In April or May comes the time to plant his remaining fields in millet, kaoliang, or cotton; often he must irrigate to assure the germination of seeds. Then comes the time to harvest the wheat, and once again the farmer calls on his whole family and often on his neighbors for harvesting, threshing, and winnowing, all done by hand with the greatest care to

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preserve every grain and the stalks and straw as well. Then the winter wheat land is planted in soybeans and corn. The farmer and his family may then slacken their pace, but not for long, for autumn brings the harvest of the summer crops, the fall plowing and then the planting of winter wheat.

Autumn, too, is the traditional time for the tax collector to appear with his demands for taxes in money or in kind.[3] And, before the Communist abolition of tenancy, it was the time when the landlord was given a portion of his share of the crop. If the weather had been favorable and the tax gatherer was not unduly rapacious, the farmer might retain enough grain to see his family through to the next harvest. If things had gone badly, a grim winter season lay ahead. Winter was in any case the time for repairing farm implements, weaving thatch, repairing buildings, spinning and weaving rough cloth, and other household chores. With the approach of the New Year the farmer might look forward to some festivity, perhaps to slaughtering the family pig; if debts loomed large, the pig might have to be sold to help.[4]

The farmer's life south of the Yangtze is similarly dominated by the need for the most intense toil throughout the year if his tiny plots of land are to support him and his family. Rice sets the rhythm

3. The tax rate was high. The average land tax in 1929-32 was US$1.79 as compared with $0.46 for all farm land in the United States in 1932. Cf. Olga Lang, Chinese Family and Society, New Haven, 1946, p. 69.

4. J. L. Buck's study of 16,786 farms showed that 39 per cent of these were in debt in the period 1929-32. Cited in Lang, op. cit., p. 69.

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and dominates the economy. Much of the rice culture of this area is on level plains, but in recent years the terraced fields have been pushed higher and higher up denuded mountains and hillsides. In the early spring, after the New Year, the farmer brings up his rice plants in nursery beds near the farmhouse. Then he prepares his fields by plowing and removing, in some areas, his winter crop stubble. Fertilizer is carefully spread over the ground, and then water is admitted; when the water reached a certain depth, the ground is carefully harrowed. The ground is now ready for the transplating of the young rice from the nursery beds, and this backbreaking job, done while crouching in the water, completes the Spring work. Save for repeated cultivating and trampling of weeds, the farmer has an easier life during the ripening of the grain. As the grain ripens, the fields dry, and at last it is harvest time. The harvesting and threshing are again the work of all available hands and are done with primitive implements. The harvest in, the farmer must deal with the tax collector and then ready his fields for the winter crops; in some parts of the Central-South Region, this may be winter wheat and rape; in others two or three rice crops are produced in a single agricultural year. The rice farmer, like the wheat farmer of the north, uses winter for work on tools, handicrafts, repairs, and the women of his family may carry forward their raising of silk worms, spinning and weaving of silk. In other areas, tea is an important supplement to rice agriculture.[5]

B. Annual Festivals

The farm year, toilsome in north and south alike, is punctuated by other activities and festivals which relieve some of the monotony of the long seasons of

5. On the agricultural year cycle, see excellent description in Gerald Winfield, China, The Land and The People, New York, 1948, pp. 34-61